



UN-HABITAT

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Address

at

**THE GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR
DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

by

**Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka
Under-Secretary-General
and
Executive Director, UN-HABITAT**

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Honourable Ministers, Sir John Holmes, Mr. Salvano Briceno, distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I have the opportunity today, to address the inaugural meeting of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Today, we are gathered to launch a new stage in the efforts of the United Nations and its partners to make our nations more resilient to the threats of natural catastrophes that devastate populations worldwide. I am proud of having been a part of events leading to this day, and look forward to continuing UN-HABITAT's engagement with the Global Platform through to the achievement of its exemplary objectives.

However, we cannot fail to notice the challenges we face while building resilience in the cities, towns and villages that make up the nations of the world. Recent natural disasters have, in their magnitude, clearly shown that – for example - what happens in Banda Aceh has a direct impact on economies of South Eastern Asia – that a hurricane in Louisiana affects foreign aid destined for Africa – and that the un-checked industrialized waste production of a few nations may condemn millions through climate change and sea-level rise.

Add to this, that this year – 2007 – is the year within which for the first time, the world's urban population will equal that of the global rural population and that within the next 13 years, fully two thirds of the global population will reside in urban environs. Today however, the majority of the world's population lives in cities of fewer than 500,000 inhabitants; and it is these cities that shall continue to absorb new residents at a higher rate than others in the future. It is also these cities that present the greatest opportunities for mitigation efforts now – before they become the mega-cities of the future.

While cities are centres of action, decision-making and commerce, they are, by virtue of their concentrations of population, also centers of risk. Increasingly, in particular in developing nations, urbanization is overwhelming the capacities of both local government and state institutions. In Africa, where the rate of urbanization is highest, the vulnerability of the poor is consequently deepening. Families fleeing from conflict, drought, flooding, and other natural and human-made disasters, often arrive with minimal assets. Having left their properties and ending up in informal settlements, they face new threats of disease, fires, and insecurity. Among these victims, we find the most vulnerable, such as women, widows and orphans.

However, this can change, and I am pleased to be present here during the launch of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction to remind you that the Hyogo Framework for Action calls upon nations to implement its five objectives defined to ensure that their citizens and representatives are aware of every opportunity to reduce vulnerabilities and increase resilience to natural and human-made risks. By your presence here, I can see obvious commitment on the part of states. Also, I can see representatives of many international agencies gathered here, and wish to share with all of you some of UN-HABITAT's thinking.

The international community is performing an ever-widening range of recovery and rehabilitation activities. This exacerbates the fundamental challenges of the crisis management and recovery processes; how to bridge the gaps that have repeatedly emerged between emergency, early recovery and sustainable development efforts, and how to provide national and local government, civil society and business organizations with practical strategies to mitigate and recover from crises, and also to prevent lapsing back into crisis. It

is equally critical to build the capacity of national and international aid agencies to deliver rapid response services that integrate a longer term developmental strategy. Based on these changing dynamics in international assistance, it is clear that a new approach is required.

The UN-HABITAT strategic policy on “Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction” has emerged through analysis of these needs. The basis of this policy is that there is no logical reason that prevents development activities from starting in the immediate aftermath of disasters. Supporting displaced people, for instance, to repossess land and property as early as possible, is crucial because land is an important asset for recovery and development. Such activities contribute to identifying protection needs and recovery opportunities linking relief and recovery in a meaningful and sustainable manner: In an effort to ‘build back better’, the potential for integrating resilience measures is highest during these times of flux. It is also essential to build trust among the victims that they will get support beyond survive.

My agency has as its mandate the promotion of socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all – this is a task we face daily, and interpret throughout the development continuum from crisis to prosperity for all. Focusing primarily on urban populations small and large, I am pleased to announce to you today, that as an element of the Global Platform, UN-HABITAT, together with the ISDR and other partners is launching a Global Forum on Urban Risk. Its inaugural meeting will take place tomorrow in a Side Event; and I encourage all of you, in particular those seized with the magnitude of vulnerability in informal settlements, those seeking to measure capacity of urban managers and poor communities to mitigate risk, and those wishing to explore how to create incentives for disaster resilient housing, schools, clinics and other public buildings - to attend. UN-HABITAT will take this initiative forward and report on the progress made during our next World Urban Forum to be held in October 2008 in Nanjing, China.

Finally, I would like to call your attention to the “UN-HABITAT Global Report on Human Settlements 2007”, which this year focuses on *Urban Safety and Security*. The report, which will be launched on the World Habitat Day in October, clearly demonstrates the importance of disaster preparedness to this undertaking.

In closing, the “Global Platform” together with the “Hyogo Framework for Action” will continue to have the support of UN-HABITAT in our joint endeavors to provide safe and resilient towns, villages and cities.

Thank you very much for your attention.